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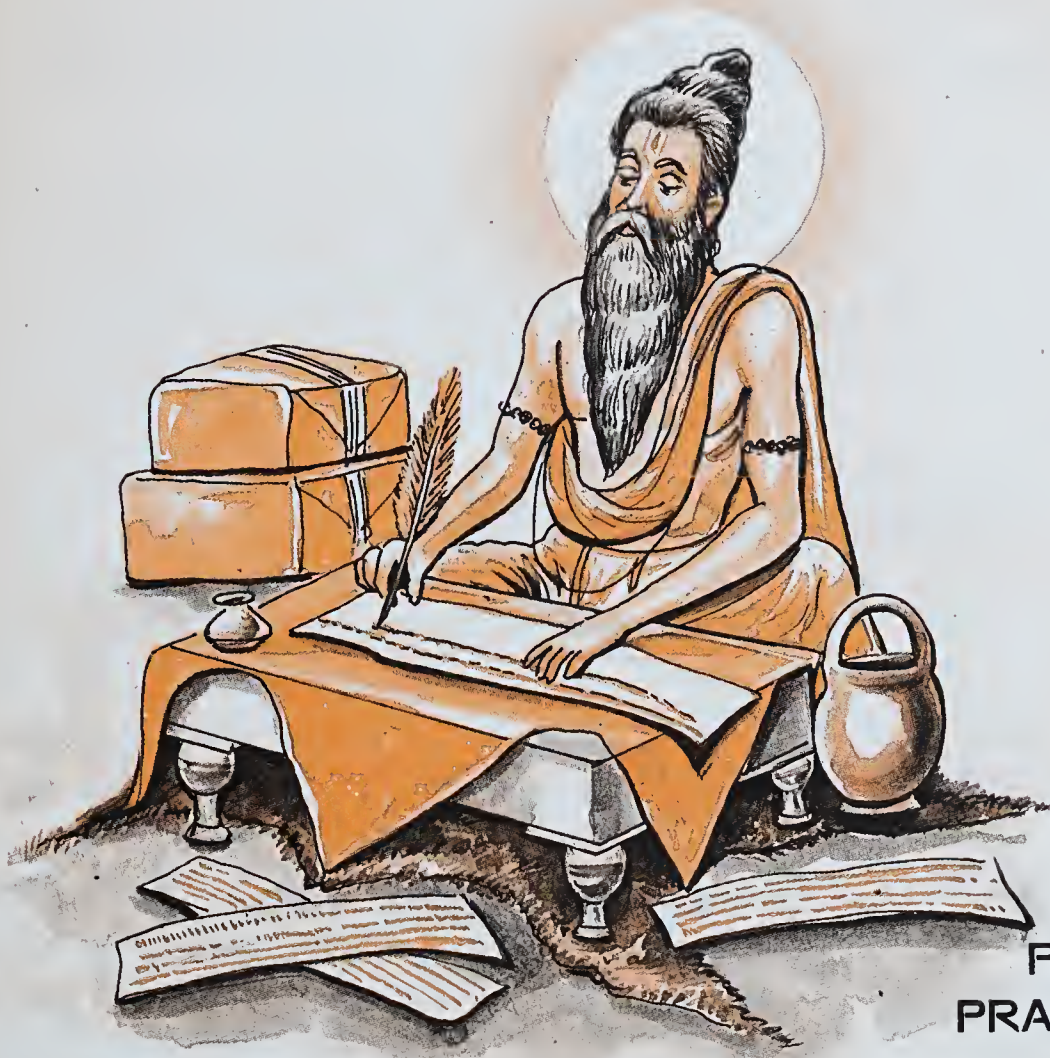
India is a land of dynamic diversity. Its recorded civilization is one of the oldest in the entire world history, dating back some five thousand years. A vast continent of nearly 870 million people, it stretches some 2000 miles North to South and about 1700 miles East to West and contains a bewildering diversity of languages, religions, races and cultures in the bosom than any other country in the world. It is because of this endlessly fascinating variety and richness that in its heyday, India used to be known as the "Golden Bird".

India is a land of great natural beauty, rich culture and religious mystique. Most of the world's religions have a home in India. It gave birth to Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. There is a strong undercurrent of unity running through this diversity and the people have always taken pride in their pluralistic culture.

"KNOW INDIA SERIES" books are designed to introduce the reader to this diversity and lead him through the long and fascinating journey of India's history, geography, mythology, art and culture.

This is a voyage of pleasant discovery.

SAGES OF INDIA



**PRABHAT
PRAKASHAN**

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Maharishi Valmiki

Maharishi Valmiki was born several thousands of years ago in India. Little is known about his birth, childhood, place of birth, parentage and caste of his parents. There are several romantic stories about him in our literature but not one of them is authentic. Tulsidas has written in his first collection 'Ramcharita Manas :

"Jaan Adi Kavi Naam Pratapu; Bhayeu Siddh Kari Ulta Japu."

In his childhood Valmiki was known as Ratnakar. There is a story about the change of his name. It is said that once he decided to give up worldly pleasures and hence started meditation. He devoted himself so much to religious prayers that he forgot all about himself. Gradually white ants wove their dwellings around him and covered him fully. So he came to be known as Valmiki.

Valmiki set up his abode (*ashram*) near Ayodhya at the bank of river Tamsa. There he started his religious prayers. He used to go to river Tamsa every day to take bath. One day while he was returning to his ashram he saw two cranes making love to each other and mating. Just as he was watching the scene, a hunter shot an arrow and killed the male crane. The female crane sat on a branch of the tree near by and started crying. On seeing this, Valmiki was grief stricken and composed a poem.

It is said that at that very time he came across Brahmaji. Brahmaji told him, "Goddess Saraswati has blessed you with powers to make



verses. You should devote yourself to present the life story of Shri Rama's life and character through your verses in such a manner that it appears as an ideal to be pursued by common man. This will lift the society to new heights of morality and make you famous."

Such a devoted, learned and simple explanation is not available in any other epic poem. That is why Valmiki is considered as an epic poet in Sanskrit literature. He had foresight and was able to compose Ramayana even before Rama was born. Ramayana is in seven parts. This epic poem contains not only the character of Rama but a full commentary on the social conditions prevailing at that time. It throws sufficient light on social conditions, administration, living conditions and habits of the people and the cultural activities of the people. In fact it is the history of '*Traita Yuga*'.

It is said that Rama was born before the Ramayana could be completed. After killing Ravana in Lanka, Rama returned to Ayodhya as a king. After some time he decided to separate himself from Sita because of aspersions that were cast by a washerman. Sita was pregnant at that time. Lakshman obeyed the orders of Rama and took Sita in a chariot to a forest where he left her and returned to Ayodhya.

Sita lived in the *ashram* of Valmiki and it was there itself that she gave birth to Lav and Kush. The two children received education and training in the ashram. It was the training which they had received from Valmiki that enabled them to stop the horse let loose by Rama for the *Ashwamedh Yajna*. The two children successfully fought with Bharat, Shatrughan and Lakshman and their armies and defeated them. Even Rama was impressed by their bravery and ready wit.

Sita arrived there alongwith Valmiki to tell the children that their father was none other than Rama. It was on her appeal to mother Earth that the ground before her caved in and she was engulfed inside. In this manner the Ramayana was completed. This epic poem is precious not only for Hindus but is respected and avidly read by scholars all over the world. Valmiki commands great respect for writing Ramayana.

Maharishi Vishwamitra

Gaadhī was one of the kings of Kushik dynasty. He had a son named Vishwamitra. Being born in the Kushik dynasty, he was known as Kaushik and his name at the time of birth was Vishwarath. He was a God-fearing and just king. Once he went out to conquer small states around his kingdom. During that time he stayed at the *ashram* (hermitage) of Vashishth. The latter welcomed him with open arms.

Rishi Vashishth had a cow 'Nandini' who was the female calf of Kamdhenu. She could deliver whatever was wished for. It was because of this cow that Vashishth was able to satisfy all the needs of the king and his army. They were served different types of delicious food. After the meals were over the king asked for the cow. Vashishth told him that the cow was very dear to him and he would not be able to part with it. Thereupon Vishwamitra ordered his army to forcibly take away the cow.

Nandini was also not inclined to leave Vashishth. She looked at Vashishth with sorrowful eyes and asked for help. She expressed her feeling by crying and showed as if the soldiers of Vishwamitra were beating her. Vashishth said, "The strength of a *Kshatriya* lies in his physical powers while the strength of a Brahmin lies in forgiveness. Go if you desire or stay with me." On hearing this Nandini, looked with anger and all of a sudden several soldiers appeared on the scene. They beat away the soldiers of Vishwamitra.



Vishwamitra was greatly annoyed at this insult. He attacked Vashishth with arrows. But he could not succeed since Vashishth had more spiritual powers. Vishwamitra came to know that it was the result of spiritual powers. So he too decided to meditate and do incantation. It was a severe form of incantation, so hard that even Indra became afraid of these religious prayers. He decided to disturb the meditation. Menaka was a siren in his royal court. She was very beautiful. He ordered her to go to the earth to Vishwamitra and disturb his meditation. Vishwamitra was easily lured by Menaka. After some time Menaka gave birth to a daughter, named Shakuntla. She was brought up in the *ashram* of Kanav Rishi.

Vishwamitra repented much on giving up his meditation. He decided to concentrate more and to perform harder incantation. Trishanku was not able to get any Brahmin to perform *yajna* due to a curse imposed by Shakti, son of Vashishth. Vishwamitra decided to help him only because he always felt that he had been insulted by Vashishth.

In the *yajna* a large number of Brahmins, including one hundred sons of Vashishth, came and Vishwamitra killed one hundred sons of Vashishth. But Vashishth neither said any reproachful words nor did anything to avenge the death of his sons.

Vishwamitra used his spiritual powers to bodily send Trishanku to heaven but the Gods pushed him back. It is said that till today Trishanku is hanging in the space.

Once Vashishth was talking to his wife, Arundhati, about Vishwamitra. Incidentally at that very time Vishwamitra stealthily reached the place. When he heard Vashishth praising him in his absence, he felt repentant. He realised that it was lack of control over his senses that was the root cause of his weakness. He once again started hard penance and incantation. Brahma was finally

pleased with his penance. Vashishth also recognized him as a *Brahm Rishi* (True Ascetic).

Vishwamitra was greatly troubled by the soldiers of Ravana, Mareech and Subhahu. They used to disturb their religious practices in the hermitage. So Vishwamitra went to king Dashrath and requested him to send Rama and Lakshman to help them; Dashrath agreed.

Vishwamitra taught the two brothers different skills of warfare and passed on heavenly arms to them to be used at crucial times. He then took them to Sita's *Swayamwara* in king Janak's court. There Rama was able to bend the famous Shiva bow and was married to Sita.

Vishwamitra is credited with formulating *Gayatri Mantra* to the Hindus. It is true that in the beginning he inflicted unjust punishment on Vashishth but later he realised that he was wrong and did penance for that. He devoted the rest of his life to self-control and social welfare.



Maharishi Vashishth

Vashishth was the son of Brahma and had appeared on the earth as a human being. His wife was Arundhati. He had conquered his senses and had full control over his emotions. So he was called Vashishth. He had control over sex-desire and anger. He was famous far and wide.

Once Vishwamitra started a world-conquest. He came to the *ashram* (hermitage) of Vashishth. Vashishth had a cow named Nandini, who could provide any thing on mere asking. With her help Vashishth was able to feed the king and his soldiers. On knowing about the unique qualities of Nandini Vishwamitra became greedy. He insisted upon Vashishth to part with Nandini. Vashishth refused.

The soldiers of Vishwamitra started taking away forcibly the cow. Nandini looked at Vashishth as if to say, "Sir, are you sending me out of your hermitage. These soldiers are beating me." Vashishth replied, "Nandini, I have not forsaken you, nor allowed these soldiers to take you. I can only forgive. Vishwamitra is forcibly taking you away."

On hearing this Nandini looked up and raising her neck made a very forceful sound. Immediately a large number of soldiers appeared and beat away the soldiers of Vishwamitra.

Vishwamitra felt insulted. He started meditation and incantation. As a result of this he was able to kill one hundred sons of Vashishth. However, Vashishth remained calm. But he could not bear the wailing of widows of his sons. He decided to commit suicide. He went to the top of Maru mountain and jumped but did not die. He tried to drown



himself. He once tried to burn himself alive. But all in vain. He was quite disappointed. He returned to his hermitage and started moving about the place.

One day when he was walking near his hermitage, he was followed by Adrishyanti, the wife of his eldest son Shakti. He heard some one reciting *Vedas* and discovered that the sound was being produced by the child in the womb of Adrishyanti. Thereupon he decided to give up his idea of committing suicide. The same child was later known as Parashar. When asked as to who would look after him, Vashishth replied that he would.

Vashishth was so generous and forgiving that he did not take offence at what Vishvamitra did to him. He told Dashrath to send Rama and inspite of his unwillingness allowed the two brothers to accompany Vishwamitra.

He spent all his time in social service and in helping every body. It was he who pacified the subjects when they were agitated at Rama's being sent away in exile and reasoned with Lakshman and Bharat to follow the right path.

He will always be known for his tolerance, taking a stand again injustice, and in spending his entire life for social uplift.



Maharishi Agastya

This tale relates to about 3000 years back. That was the time when the Aryans had well established themselves in the north of India. But they had not advanced towards the south. This was because of the Vindhyanchal mountain which had spread itself in the path of the Aryans and had obstructed their movement towards the south. Its high peaks, low valleys, rivers and dense forests had checked the Aryans from reaching the south of India.

The Aryan saints and preachers were bent on spreading their ideas and preachings all over the country. They roamed over the country. They followed ideals and spent a whole life following these ideals. Agastya was one such preacher and saint. He was the first to cross the Vindhyanchal mountain ranges and later on several others followed him.

Agastya married Lopamudra, the daughter of the king of Vidarbha. He travelled far and wide in the south of India and spread the Aryan ideals. He killed demons like Illwall and Watapee. Other demons became afraid of him.

He finally settled at Panchvati at the coast of river Godavari. This was a very quiet and scenic place. Lord Rama also stayed at this place. In fact Rama was much impressed by the beauty and peaceful surroundings of Panchvati. Agastya welcomed Rama with open arms. He gave him food and requested him to stay there. He recognized that Rama and Lakshman were brave warriors and gave him all the arms and ammunition so that he could use these at the



SAPNA ADS

appropriate time. He then went towards further south. It is said that Agastya was instrumental in bringing the waters of Cauvery to this region.

Agastya spread Aryan culture and literature in the south of India. He removed the social barriers between Aryans and Dravidians. He treated them as equals. He wrote the first grammar of Tamil language. He also organised a *Sangham*, a meeting between Aryan and Tamil writers.

Poet Kamb has written a Ramayana in Tamil language and in that he has much praised Agastya. He has not only spread the message of Aryan culture in India but also in Java, Sumatra, Malaya and Borneo. Even today Agastya is held in high esteem in these countries.



Maharishi Vyas

About 5000 years ago there lived a tribe in India known as Dhiwars. The king of Dhiwars had a very beautiful daughter named Satyavati. Once Rishi Parashar chanced to visit that place. He wanted to cross the river at that point. He was welcomed by Satyavati who also took him in a ferry across the river. Parashar was much pleased by her behaviour and beauty and blessed her that all her life her body will bear a very pleasant odour. It was due to his blessings that she gave birth to a child.

The child had dark complexion. He was called Krishna. Since he was born on an island he was also known as Dwapayan. This boy was later known as Vedvyas. After some time, Parashar took the child to his hermitage and gave him education in the holy scriptures. The boy was very intelligent and sharp. He soon learnt all the arts and knowledge of holy books. As he grew up he divided the *Vedic Mantras* into four parts and that is why he came to be known as Vedvyas.

After many years King Shantanu became enamoured of Satyavati and married her. She gave birth to two children – Chitrangad and Vichitravirya. Unfortunately they died without any offsprings. Satyavati became worried as to who would adorn the throne and become the king of Hastinapur. She thought of her ascetic son, Vedvyas and called him to her. It was on her direction that Vedvyas, through his yogic powers, made the wives of Chitrangad and Vichitravirya conceive and gave birth to Dhritrashtra and Pandu. A third grand son was born to one of the maids and was named Vidur.



Dhritrashtra was born blind but he was very strong. Pandu was weak and pale but he became the king of Hastinapur. Vidur was very shrewd and wise. A hundred sons were born to Dhritrashtra including Duryodhan. Pandu had five sons – Yudhishtir, Bhim, Arjun, Nakul and Sahdev. Dhritrashtra's sons were known as Kauravas and Pandu's sons were known as Pandavas. The Mahabharata was later fought between these Kauravas and Pandavas. Vedvyas has written the history of Kauravas and Pandavas and also narrated the story of Mahabharata. He also mentioned various tales providing insight into customs, religious beliefs and knowledge prevailing at that time.

Vedvyas had provided special visionary powers to Sanjay during the Mahabharata and he could narrate all the events of war to Dhritrashtra. The battle was fought with all ferociousness for eighteen days. Several brave soldiers were killed. In the end, the Pandavas came out victorious.

Dhritrashtra became very sad and pessimistic. Gandhari was greatly annoyed. She blamed Lord Krishna for the death of her one hundred sons and cursed him. It was Vedvyas who gave religious discourses to both of them and removed their misgivings and sorrow.

Vedvyas sent Yudhishtir to Bhishm to learn the art of governance and administration. He was pacified by Bhishm. Vedvyas told Yudhishtir about the gold mines in the Himalayas. Yudhishtir gave away his entire kingdom in alms to Vedvyas during a *yajna* but Vedvyas returned all that.

Abhimanyu's grandson and Parikshit's son ruled over the kingdom of Hastinapur. Vedvyas was also present during the *yajna* exterminating serpents. It was on his command that one of his disciples, Vaishampayan, narrated the entire story of the Mahabharata to Janamejaya.

Vedvyas lived long. He was a great writer. He spent the last few years of his life in the Himalayas alongwith his disciples. There are several places in the Himalayas which are named after Vedvyas.

Maharishi Dayanand

Dayanand was born in 1824 in Tankara village in Gujarat. His father, Karshranji, was a rich Brahmin. Then Tankara was situated in Morvi distt. In the beginning Dayanand was named Moolshanker.

It was on the Shivratri day that all the Brahmins of the area had kept a fast. So had the child Moolshanker. At night while all the adults were sleeping, the child Moolshanker was intently watching the *Shiva Linga* (phallus of Lord Shiva) with devotion in his heart. Suddenly he saw that a rat was climbing up and down the *linga* and eating and spoiling the *prasad* kept at the place. He woke up his father and asked him why that was happening. The father replied that the *linga* was only a symbol and it was kept for purposes of worship. There-upon, child Moolshankar decided to search for God.

Two years after this incident his sister died of cholera. His uncle also died after some time. Moolshanker did not cry. He once again decided to search for Lord Shiva and to overcome death. His father tried to dissuade him but in vain.

One day he quietly left his house and wandered over valleys, hills, forests and plains. In 1858 he came across Swami Virjanand in Mathura and became his disciple. In three years he learnt a lot and with the blessings of his teacher he left to bring about social reforms.

He used to wear only a loin cloth. He travelled all over the country and went to several religious seats of learning of conventional Hindus. He engaged them in discourses and debates and removed many of the myths surrounding these religious places. Some



times traditional Hindus would feel hostile towards him and even stone him. Once a man gave him poison; but Dayanand forgave all. Even when this man, who had tried to poison him, was brought before him by a Muslim landlord, Saiid Mohammad, Dayanand said, "I have come to the world to liberate people, not to imprison them. If someone can not give up his evil doing why should I give up my right doing?"

Wherever he went people gave serious thought to his discourses. He met kings and rajas and told them to be patriotic and follow the path of social welfare. Even the British government paid heed to his preachings and favoured reforms as proposed by Dayanand. He advised the High Commissioner of Ajmer to ban cow slaughter. The commissioner agreed.

He was against conversion of Hindu untouchables into Islam or Christianity. He spoke to them where ever he went and assured them that all those who practised Aryan religion and culture were equal irrespective of whether they were high caste Hindus or untouchables. He never discriminated between the two.

On 10th April, 1874 he established Arya Samaj in Bombay with the aim of achieving the ideal of 'Kranvanto Vishwamaryam'. Gradually it has spread all over the country.

Towards the end of his life he went to Jodhpur. The king of Jodhpur was under the influence of a prostitute. He spoke to the king exhorting to administer the State with efficiency and justice to all. The king listened to him and assured him that he would follow the advice given by Dayanand. Since this had gone against the interests of that prostitute, she swore to take revenge on Swamiji. She bribed the cook of Swamiji and made him mix finely crushed glass in the milk drunk by Swamiji. As a result of this his condition deteriorated and on 30th October 1883, which was also Diwali day, he expired. His last words – "It was the will of God."

Swamiji wanted to see the country on the path of progress and development. He followed the *Vedas* and believed that the caste of

a person should be determined not by birth but by his deeds and actions. If a person born of low caste parents was well educated, then he should be treated at par with Brahmins. He firmly believed that education should be imparted to all irrespective of caste. He was the first Indian to insist upon the use of *Swadeshi* (indigenous) goods and articles by Indians. He had also used the word *Swaraj* for the first time. Writing in his book 'Satyarth Prakash' he mentioned, "Self-government is better than some one else's good administration."

Swamiji was a Gujarati and his mother tongue was Gujarati. But he adopted Hindi as the national language and wrote articles and books in Hindi. He preached that Hindi should be adopted as the national language. He inaugurated schools and widow-houses all over the country. He opposed child marriage and favoured remarriage of widows. He believed in celibacy. He did not marry all his life. He wrote books entitled 'Ved Bhashya', 'Sanskarvidhi', 'Panchmahayajna' and 'Gokarunandhi' etc. In fact it was due to his ceaseless efforts that he was able to introduce several important social reforms in the country.



Swami Vivekanand

Vishwanath was a High Court Barrister in Calcutta. He had very good practice and was fairly rich. He had two daughters. He and his wife Bhuvaneshwari Devi prayed to Lord Shiva for long and finally the Lord blessed them with a son named Narendra. This child was later known as Swami Vivekanand.

In childhood he was very playful. He was very fond of horse driven carriage. So when one day his father asked him as to what he would like to do when he grew up, he replied that he would like to be a driver. Likewise, the neighbours had spread the word that there was a demon on the *champa* tree, he went up and calling all his friends told them that there was nobody there.

He joined Calcutta General Assembly College after passing matriculation examination. He was very popular in the college. He always had a religious bent of mind and wanted to know about God. He listened to the speeches of Keshav Chandra Sen and Devendra Nath Thakur of Brahma Samaj and always wanted to know more.

One day Swami Ramakrishna Paramhans visited some of his neighbours. Narendra also went to listen to the discourse of Paramhansji. There he sang '*Chalo re man nicketana*'. Paramhans was impressed and invited him to visit Dakshineshwar temple. Narendra started visiting the temple every day. He was deeply impressed by the loving behaviour of Paramhansji and listened to the devotional songs by Paramhansji. He was taken as a disciple by Paramhansji.



One day his father died. His family had to face an economic crisis as there was no earning hand in the family. At times he betrayed lack of faith in God. One day he asked his *guru* (teacher) for some monetary help. Paramhansji replied, "Go and ask the goddess for whatever you want." Narendra went inside where the idol of deity was installed and said, "O Mother ! Give me knowledge, understanding and devotion." The goddess was pleased and after this he was never in need of any thing. Alongwith his friends he became an ascetic there itself and came to be known as Vivekanand. He took a vow that instead of improving his spiritual knowledge he would ceaselessly work for the uplift of the world. He spent the entire life in fulfilling his vow.

Swami Ramakrishna Paramhans expired on 16th August, 1886. Vivekanand decided to leave the temple and to go all over the country. He went to Kashi, Prayag, Rajasthan, Punjab, Kashmir etc. There he found that the people had many superstitions and wrong ideas about life and God. He preached knowledge removing these myths and reached Rameshwaram and Kanyakumari. There he came to know that an All World Religion Convention was being organised in America. People asked him to go there but he waited as if he was expecting a command.

One day he was standing at the coast of Kanyakumari watching the sea. Suddenly he felt that Paramhansji was calling him. Though he was hungry at that time yet he took a plunge and swam till he reached a watershed stone. There he concentrated on God and meditated and received knowledge. Today that stone is known as 'Vivekanand Stone' and a temple at great cost of money has been erected there.

In May 1893 he went to Chicago to attend the All World Religion Convention. He lacked funds needed to take part in the Convention. Also he was not representing any Organisation and was told that he would not be allowed to attend the Convention. He was greatly disappointed. But by chance, an old lady introduced him to

a professor of Harvard University, Prof. Right, and made it possible for him to attend the Convention.

It was on 11th September, 1893 that he delivered his first lecture. At first he was shy and hesitant. But hardly had he said, "Sisters and Brothers of America" that an applause broke through the congregation. He was much encouraged. He delivered several lectures in different parts of America. He then went to Europe and was invited by different organisations in different European countries to deliver lectures on Hinduism.

On returning to India Swamiji was so overwhelmed that he took the earth in his hands and besmeared himself with it saying, "O Mother ! I had been away for long. Now I want to be a part of you again."

In Colombo people have built a big temple in his memory. He had established Ramakrishna Mission centres all over the world and several others were established later by his disciples. An Irish lady, Miss Nobel Margaret, came to India to be a disciple of Swamiji and to spread his teachings. She was much welcomed here.

Swamiji's health started falling due to hard work and incessant travel. On 4th July, 1902 he expired at his Belur temple. He was only 39 years old but had emerged as a great leader and Hindu philosopher.



Swami Rama Tirath

Goswami Hiranandji was blessed with a son on 22nd October, 1873, the day after Diwali. Hiranandji was a resident of Muraliwala village in Gujranwala district in Punjab. The parents were very happy but within two months of child's birth his mother died. He was brought up by his aunt. In childhood his name was Tirathrama.

He was God fearing, very religious from very beginning. Whenever he would hear the sound of temple bells he would run to the temple. He was also much interested in studies. He stood first in the matriculation examination throughout the district and again stood first in M.A. examination throughout Punjab. He had obtained exceptional expertise in Mathematics.

He was married at the age of ten. He took tuitions to earn a living. He was very religious and visited Mathura, Vrindavan, Gokul, Barsana, Nandgram etc. He was a professor of Mathematics at Mission College, Lahore. He left his job and devoted himself to religion. He changed his name to Rama Tirath. He travelled all over the country and was greatly impressed by the teachings of Vivekanand. He went to America, Japan and several other countries to spread the message of Indian culture.

Once an English couple laughed at him on the road. he was very tolerant and had control over his senses. He said nothing but put one finger on the cheek of the male. This caused a boil there. This shows that he was very tolerant and had control over his senses.



He preached that every one should do one's duty. In Tokyo he delivered a lecture entitled 'The Secret of Success' and exhorted people to continuously work for progress. After spending two and a half years abroad he returned to India. Here he was much welcomed by the people. The British Government deputed two officers of the CID to keep an eye on him. On seeing them he laughed heartily and told them, "The best thing is to devote yourself to God and to know about His mysteries." There upon the two CID officers fell at his feet and asked for forgiveness.

Towards the end of his life he went to Tehri Garhwal. It was a free Indian State. He was welcomed by the king there. He was provided living accommodation in Chandra Bhavan. After some time he left the palace and started living in a cottage at the bank of river Ganga.

On Diwali day, 17th September, 1906 he entered the river waters and took *Jal Samadhi* (expired) at the age of 33 years.



Jagatguru Shankeracharya

Acharya Shanker was born in a Namboodaripad Brahmin family in 778 in village Kalti in Kerala. Some people believe that his birth took place in 684. He was the only child of Shiv Guru and Sati, his parents. From childhood he behaved like an ascetic. He used to ask his mother, Sati, to allow him to become an ascetic. But the mother did not permit him to do so.

One day both the mother and the child were taking their bath in the river when the child shouted, "A crocodile has taken hold of my leg. Unless you allow me to become an ascetic it shall not leave me." The mother started crying but finally allowed him. The crocodile left off and went away. As soon as they came out of the river, the mother asked the child to accompany her home. But the child said, "You have allowed me to become an ascetic. How can I go home now?" The mother allowed him after getting a promise that he would fulfill all the cremation customs on her death.

He left for different places in the country in search of Truth. Those days the country was full of Buddhists and Black Magicians. He argued with Buddhists and defeated them and thus forced them to change their views. As a result of this, the *Vedic* preachers gained supremacy in the eyes of the people. People started following the path shown by great sages, and once again started believing in God. They started adopting *Vedic* religion which they considered to be superior. He made debaters like Mandan Mishra and Kumaril Bhatt eat the dust in discussions and made them his followers.



One day he felt that the end of his mother was near. He at once reached Kalti. The mother became very happy on seeing him. When she died he performed the last rites. This was opposed by conventional Hindu *pandits* who pointed out that an ascetic could not perform the last rites. But Shanker had to keep his word to his mother.

One day a black magician got hold of Shanker and wanted to kill him as a sacrifice to please a Goddess. Shanker told him that he should not do so as he had to do a lot for the country and the people. But the magician was adamant. So he told the magician that he could come to him at the time of sunrise the day after and cut his head near the river where he would be meditating. The magician agreed. But before that could happen, the magician was killed by a disciple of Shanker. At this Shanker was very angry with his disciple.

Shankeracharya established several religious sites of learning, known as *matths*, in different parts of the country, particularly in four directions. In the north it is at Badrinath; in the west it is at Dwarka Puri; in the east it is at Jagannath Puri and in the south it is at Rameshwaram. He contributed a lot towards the integrity of the country.

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